

# **The Union of Russian Workers: What It Is and How It Operates**

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**by Edgar B. Speer  
US Department of Justice**

*At Pittsburgh, Pa.*

From the 6th to the 9th of January, 1919, the 2nd Convention of the Russian Colonies was held in New York City. One hundred twenty-three delegates participated in the convention and they represented 33,975 Russians, according to the *Soviet of Workingmen's Deputies of the US and Canada Weekly*. The independent element was represented by 60 delegates; Union of Russian Workers, 49; Socialists, 9; Industrial Workers of the World, 2; and Anarchists, 3. During the convention, Peter Bianki, who represented the Union of Russian Workers of the United States and Canada and the anarchists, declared from the convention floor: "The Union of Russian Workers deny any form of power and government because where government begins, revolution ends and where there is revolution there is no place for government." Bianki further declared that the Union of Russian Workers has found it possible to support the Bolsheviks in its struggle against the counterrevolution because the Bolsheviks undoubtedly are the most revolutionary part of the Russian Social Democratic Party. The foregoing briefly sets forth the principles as they exist today of

the Russian Workingmen's Association, sometimes called the Union of Russian Workers.

In 1907 the Russian radicals in New York had no comprehensive organization. Some of them belonged to the Socialist Revolutionary Party, which also included some of the Russian anarchists. There was trouble among the members of this organization and a Russian anarchist by the name of William Shatov, sometimes called Shatoff, who now occupies a prominent position in the Lenin government in Russia; another Russian by the name of A. Rode, who is still living in the United States; a man by the name of Dieproski; a Finnish anarchist by the name of Peterson, who it is understood is still living in the United States under the name of Peters; and several others. These met and formed a Russian anarchist group. The group was in existence about 6 months when it began the publication of a monthly paper called *Golos Truda* (Voice of Labor). This paper was published for about 6 months in New York City when the Post Office Department in New York issued an order prohibiting its mailing on account of its anarchistic character.

Through the influence of *Golos Truda* the Anarchist Group succeeded in getting a considerable number of kindred spirits organized into anarchist groups in Philadelphia, Penn.; Chicago, Ill.; Brooklyn, NY; and Elizabethport, NJ. After the newspaper was suppressed a conference or convention was held in New York sometime in 1908 and it was decided to form an organization to be known as the Russian Workingmen's Association and to publish a monthly paper (*Voice of Labor*) to be owned by the Russian Labor Publishers of New York. At this convention the newspaper was designated the official organ of the Anarchist-Communists in the United States and so was born the Russian Workingmen's Association, sometimes called the Union of Russian Workers.

The following officers were elected: Shatov, Editor of the *Voice of Labor*; and A. Rode, Secretary and Treasurer. Plans were perfected for the organization in various points and cities in the United States and Canada of 50 locals under the name of Russian Workingmen's Association. The New York Group assumed the leadership of the Association and from it emanated all the plans and propaganda. The newspaper was published monthly until 1912. From that year it was published weekly until it was finally suppressed by the federal government in 1917, the last issue being Friday, April 13th of that year. The publication office was at 586 East 140th Street.

In 1912 a Convention of the Association was held in Philadelphia; Shatov and Rode had communicated with the French Anarcho-Syndicalists and a delegate named Muchin was sent from Paris. Through the influence of Muchin, Shatov, and Rode, the *Voice of Labor*, which had formerly been advocating Anarchist-Communism changed its policy to Anarcho-Syndicalism, the reason being given at the Philadelphia Convention was that America was not yet ripe for Communism and that the conditions of the working men in this country could be better taken care of by Syndicalism than by Communism.

Following the Convention, Muchin visited several cities in the United States and spent some time in the Pittsburgh district. The *Voice of Labor* immediately changed its policy following the Philadelphia Convention and began advocating Anarcho-Syndicalism. This was done, however, without full authority from the 50 or more locals through the continent. The result was that immediately a great deal of contention arose among the members of the Association as to whether it should be the champion of Anarchist-Communism or Anarcho-Syndicalism. The locals seemed to be equally divided and as a rule the membership of each local was equally divided as well. A condition was brought about

that resulted in a faction of the membership of the Association operating with Muchin, Shatov, and Rode, and a fraction opposed to the three leaders.

Contention grew and had about disrupted the Association when at the beginning of the European War Prince Peter Kropotkin, the father of modern Anarchy and an advocate of Communism, sent an open letter to Russian Anarchists all over the world urging them to enlist with the Allies and to Fight German Militarism. Kropotkin's reason for such action was that if German Militarism prevailed, Anarchist-Communism all over the world would be unable to succeed or progress. He cited in his open letter what took place during the Paris Commune of the 18th of March, 1871, at which time the French government lost power to control the people in the Paris district and the French aristocrats and diplomats, realizing the situation, petitioned the German Emperor through Bismarck for help. The German Emperor sent an army to France and crushed the Paris Commune.

Probably the most important convention that the Union of Russian Workingmen in the United States and Canada held was the meeting in Detroit which convened from July 1st to July 7th, 1914. At this gathering a number of resolutions were passed which subsequently were drafted into the Constitution for the organization. At this convention there were delegates from Brooklyn, New York; New York City; Cosmopolis and Seattle, Washington; Portland, Oregon; Vancouver and Victoria, Canada; Chicago, Illinois; Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; Lynn, Salem, and Brockton, Massachusetts; and Providence, RI. The Association as it exists today is operating under the 1914 Constitution which has not been materially changed. The dues books as issued to members today contain the preamble as adopted by the Detroit Convention. That preamble is as follows:

Present society is divided into two opposing classes: the downtrodden workers and peasants, on the one side, producing by their work all the riches of the world; the rich people, on the other side, who have grabbed all the riches into their hands.

Many a time the class of the oppressed stood up against the rich parasites and their faithful servant and protector — the government — to conquer its full liberation from the yoke of capitalism and political power; but every time it suffered defeat, not being fully conscious of its own final goal and means, by which victory can be accomplished, thus remaining only a weapon in the hands of its enemies.

The struggle between these two classes is being fought also at the present time and will end only when the Toiling Masses, organized as a class, will understand their true interests and will make themselves masters of all the riches of the world by means of a violent social revolution.

Having accomplished such a change and having annihilated at the same time all the institutions of the government and state, the class of the disowned must establish the society of free producers, aiming at satisfying the needs of every individual person who, on its side, is giving to the society their labor and their knowledge.

For the attainment of these aims, we consider as of primary importance the necessity of building up a wide revolutionary organization of toilers which, by conducting a direct struggle with all the institutions of capitalism and government, must train the working class to initiative and independent action in all its acts, thus educating it in the consciousness of the absolute necessity of a general strike — of the social revolution.

## **STATUTES OF THE UNION OF RUSSIAN WORKERS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA, UNITED IN FEDERATION.**

### **Aims of the Federation**

1. To unite all organizations of Russian workers in the US and Canada for the common struggle against capitalism and government (state).
2. To aid the movement of liberation in Russia.

3. To help the revolutionary actions of the American workers.
4. The moral and material aid to the organ of the federation, *Nabat*.
5. To build up organizations where there are none and to aid those already in existence.

### **Mutual Relationship of the Organization**

Every member of a union is at the same time entitled to equal membership in every other union which forms part of the federation.

All organizations belonging to the federation enjoy full autonomy and should help each other materially and morally, in the fullest measure.

### **Means of the Federation**

The means of the federation are composed of the 10¢ monthly contributions of the members of the organization and of voluntary contributions.

### **The Management of the Federation**

For the management of the functions of the federation are designated a Secretary and Treasurer, who performs all the correspondence for the federation.

It will be noted by a comparison of the foregoing preamble and the preamble of the Constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World that there is a considerable similarity. It might be fair to assume that the Russian Workingmen's Association was modeled at least to some extent after the Industrial Workers of the World.

From the thorough inception of the Association, the organizers and prime movers put into practice a systematic scheme of propaganda for the education of Russian immigrants in the United States with a view to developing them into anarchists. Invariably schools are established in connection with each local. It was planned to have each local situated in large centers of Russian population. When a local was established, a night school, which operated from 3 to 5 nights a week, was started at the local's headquarters. Approximately 75% of the Russians who immigrate to this country are illiterate; they are not only unable to read and

write English, but they are unable to also read and write their own language. With the establishment of a local and the opening of a night school in conjunction, the local secretary would announce that reading and writing were taught for small monthly dues. The result was that ambitious but illiterate Russians unknowingly would become members of the association, believing that a payment of a specified sum was the tuition to night school and not the monthly dues to this anarchistic outfit. As the scholars progressed they would become eager for reading matter and they were immediately furnished with pamphlets on anarchistic subjects. Pamphlets were furnished to the various locals throughout the United States and Canada from the headquarters of the organization in New York City, which today is 133 East 15th Street. I understand that a great deal of this literature is now being published in Detroit, Michigan. Such tactics have kept a continual flow of new members into the organization. The raw material has been converted into anarcho-syndicalists, communists, and terrorists and they have been taught "to deny any form of power and government, because where government begins, revolution ends and where there is revolution there is no place for any government."

The Association in 1907 started with a dozen or so clever radicals; today it has a membership which is estimated from 10,000 to 15,000. Of this number there are probably some who know that they are members of the Union of Russian Workers but do not know that the outfit is an anarchist organization. However, they are being quickly educated and by the plan of education adopted by the association the membership is steadily increasing.

The association grew fairly rapidly from 1908 to 1917 despite the contention over anarchist-communism and anarcho-syndicalism. Each local surrounded its meetings with secrecy and the existence of the association was known to but few. Many of

those who did know that it existed believed it to be an aggregation of Russians which was teaching its members the duties and privileges of American citizenship. The original organizers played a very important part in the management of its affairs until 1917, when many of them returned to Russia. Quite a number of them played prominent parts in the Bolshevik uprising against the Kerensky Government. Some of them today hold responsible positions in the Lenin-Trotsky regime. Shatov, one of the original organizers of the association and an anarchist of the terrorist type is now Chief of Police at Petrograd.

As I stated, the official organ of the organization, *Golos Truda*, was suppressed by the federal government in 1917. Shatov was then editor and A. Rode, Secretary and Treasurer. Soon after the newspaper was suppressed Shatov left for Russia, but before his departure he entrusted to one Adolph Sanabel, alias Adolph Schnabel Delas, alias Comrade Sabba, alias Comrade Savva, the propaganda program of the organization. Sanabel was peculiarly fitted for the work. He was a Russian by birth but of Teutonic origin. He had been in the Russian Army and served through a part of the Russ-Jap War and sometime later deserted. He was an Anarchist and an advocate of Communism. He spoke several languages fluently, among them English, and was well versed along radical lines. He was a man of imposing presence, an orator, and a cool, collected schemer. Sanabel in January 1918 with an anarchist group in New York City back of him, established a newspaper named *Nabat* (The Alarm). This publication took up the work of *Golos Truda* and became the official organ of the Russian Workingmen's Association. Sanabel prior to the establishment of *Nabat* was frequently in difficulty with the New York Police Department, the Bomb Squad giving him particular attention. He was active in anti-war propaganda. The man published *Nabat* during the months of January, February, and March 1918. The

policy of the newspaper was anarchist-communism. The last issue was published in March of 1918; the *Nabat* was then suppressed by the New York Police Department acting in conjunction with Federal Agents, and Sanabel, fearing arrest, fled the city. He located in Detroit under the name of Adolph Delas. The man was a machinist by trade but seldom worked. He lived for the most part on money contributed to him in small sums by Russian Anarchists. During January [1919], Sanabel decided to make a tour of the Eastern part of the United States in an effort to strengthen the Union of Russian Workmen and organize new locals. He planned to visit Akron, Ohio, spend a week or two in the Pittsburgh district, Erie, Penn., and Buffalo, New York. The Russian Anarchists in Buffalo were unorganized although they were considerable in number and Sanabel planned to organize a Union of Russian Workmen's local. He came to Pittsburgh about the middle of February [1919] under the name of Comrade Savva and spent about a week in the district addressing meetings in secret with enthusiastic Anarchists, many of them Terrorists, and addressing in public Russian gatherings. He was arrested on a warrant from the Department of Labor and held for deportation.

The last convention of the association was held in secret Friday, January 10th, 1919, at 133 East 15th Street, New York City. This convention immediately followed the 2nd Convention of the Russian Colonies mentioned before, which was held in New York City from January 6th to January 9th, 1919. The association convention of January 10th was held in the basement of #133 East 15th Street and about 50 delegates attended. There were delegates from Newark, NJ; Baltimore, Md.; Philadelphia, Pa.; Hartford, Conn.; Albion, Mich.; Bridgeport, Conn.; New London, Conn.; Bronx, NY; Pittsburgh, Pa.; Ford City, Canada; and several other cities. All the delegates reported considerable progress in the anarchist movement. Many of them reported that terrorists were

numbered among [their] locals and were ready for any sort of work when the time came for a revolution. One delegate reported that plans had been made by his local to seize the church in his city and the Russian minister and convert it into a place of amusement. Adolph Sanabel, who was acting as chairman of the convention, made several speeches. During one of the speeches he said "Churches are the damnable institutions we ought to destroy as a first step in our attempt to bring about a revolution in the United States." During the convention the question was brought up as to whether the association retain the name of the Union of Russian Workers or declare publicly as anarchists. The question was debated for several hours and finally closed by a speech of Sanabel who said

Comrades, after listening to your arguments for some time I see that you are just as far from settling this question as you were when you opened the debate. I will tell you from my own practical point of view as long as I can remember, I never met a member of the Union of Russian Workers that did not know he was an anarchist. In the first place if we retain the name, Union of Russian Workers, we will be able to cover ourselves from government oppression. Secondly, we will be able to induce new members into the organization who now are afraid to become anarchists; further I make motion that we retain the name of Union of Russian Workers.

The motion passed.

The question of the Anarchist association's attitude toward the Bolsheviks was discussed. It was finally voted to help the Bolsheviks in Russia and the United States but to oppose the Bolsheviks for the recognition of any form of government. Peter Bianki was elected Secretary of the Association and the convention adjourned.

The Russian Workingmen's Association, sometimes called the Union of Russian Workers, as it exists today is an aggregation of individuals to deny the power of government and who have declared themselves for the annihilation of all institutions of government and state. Its membership is confined to Russians who for the most part are not naturalized citizens of the United States and who are well versed in every form of radicalism but who know nothing of the history and form of government of this nation.

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For the better understanding of the terms used in the foregoing, I am giving the following definitions:

**Anarchy:** Without a head. The philosophy of anarchy is not constructive; it is purely destructive and philosophical. Anarchists believe in the abolition of all governments and laws; the abolition of geographical districts and boundaries so that all men will be united as equals.

**Syndicalism:** The syndicalist movement is a movement originating in France at the time of the French Revolution, with the belief that all governments should be overthrown and that the workers of the world should be united in a cooperative commonwealth. In syndicalism there will be no government only insofar as to distribution of the products of the workers' toil are concerned. Syndicalism has also been defined as economical anarchy.

**Anarchist-terrorist:** An individual who adopts tactics of spreading terror in a community to accomplish the establishment of any of the various brands of radicalism.

**Anarchist-syndicalism:** The bringing about of syndicalism by anarchistic terroristic methods or tactics, such as direct action, sabotage, expropriation, etc.

***Communism:*** Is a theory of the existence of a community where people live on terms of equality and conduct manufacturing, agricultural, and various other enterprises, and where everyone is entitled to receive whatever is necessary for the maintenance of his life. There are various schemes for this distribution of the fruits of the enterprises to the members of the community.

***Anarchistic-communism:*** Is the theory that each man shall receive whatever is necessary for his existence.

The Russian Workingmen's Association as it exists today is divided between the advocates of anarchist-syndicalism and anarchist-communism.

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